

Sunday-School Conventions:

THEIR OBJECTS AND IMPORTANCE,

AND THE

BEST METHODS OF CONDUCTING THEM,

TWO PRIZE ESSAYS.

BY

REV. GEORGE BELL, OF CLIFTON,

AND

REV. JOHN WOOD, OF BRANTFORD.



Toronto:

PRINTED FOR THE ASSOCIATION,

BY LOVELL & GIBSON.

1867

L
F/1028
1867 B A 3

NOTE.

Previous to the assembling of the late Provincial Sabbath School Convention, the Executive Committee offered two Prizes—one of \$50 and one of \$25—for the best Essays on "Sunday School Conventions: their objects and importance, and the best methods of conducting them." In response to this offer ten Essays were sent in, and these having been carefully examined by a competent committee, the First Prize was unanimously awarded to the Essay written by the Rev. George Bell, of Clifton, and the Second Prize to that written by the Rev. John Wood, of Brantford.

These admirable Essays, besides being printed in the Report of the Convention, are now issued in the present form, the Executive Committee being of opinion that their general circulation will prove of great benefit to the Sunday School cause.

Copies may be had from the General Secretary, Rev. William Millard Toronto, at five cents each. Also copies of the Report for 1867, at 15 cents each.

Sabbath-School Conventions;

THEIR IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS, AND THE BEST METHOD OF CONDUCTING THEM.

BY REV. GEORGE BELL.

Being the Essay to which was awarded the First Prize, at the Provincial Sabbath-School Convention of 1867.

One of the most wonderful facts to be observed in the Christian Church of the present day is the position occupied by the Sabbath-school. Of comparatively recent origin, it embraces a million of teachers and six millions of pupils. A power in the old and wealthy congregation, an important agency in the new and struggling Mission Station; an angel of light and joy to the dens of wretchedness in the crowded city, and a messenger of glad tidings to the distant country settlement, its blessed influence has grown with astonishing rapidity; and its results in proportion to the mental and pecuniary wealth of capital employed, have shown it to be an evangelistic agency of high value to the Church of Christ. In the creation of a new literature of most extensive influence, in re-modelling Church Architecture, in rapidity of growth, in vastness of equipment, and power of earnest working, it stands alone, as the great fact of the day.

The great object of the Sabbath-School enterprise is the salvation of the young. We seek to lay hold of the young life and have it given to Jesus; to reach the fountain of influence in the human mind, and impress it for eternal life. A pebble or a few grains of sand may decide whether the rain drops falling on the crest of the Rocky Mountains shall flow Westward to the Pacific Ocean, or Eastward to the Gulf of Mexico, but let the little rills combine into the broad and deep river, and what power can turn it from its course? So a gentle influence may turn the tender heart of the child into a heavenward course, but if that child is left alone until evil passions have grown strong, these passions become like the irresistible river. To draw the lambs to Jesus, to labour for the development and training and working out of a Christian character, and to train up the youth to a ripe Bible scholarship are the aims of Sabbath-School workers. Who then are qualified for such a work? In the urgent call for labourers many must be employed who have not had great advantages in early life as regards scholarship, and comparatively few have had much experience in the principles and practice of Sabbath School teaching. They may have a fair education, they may be careful students of the Bible, and they may be earnestly pious, but without experience or special training, they work at a sad disadvantage either in the general management of a Sabbath-School, or in the teaching of a class. Even were opportunities of training in all the qualifications of good teachers much more abundant than they are, a very great deficiency would be practically felt, arising from the rapid development of the Sabbath-School work, and the wide extent of its field of operation. To be a good Sabbath-School teacher involves a number of qualifications, as, earnest piety, a good education

acquaintance with the Bible, and the numerous appliances in use for its elucidation, considerable power of illustration, and aptness to teach, as well as the power of managing a class, the members of which are brought together only once a week, keeping them in order, exciting an interest in the lesson, and maintaining that interest to its close. The proper management of a school involves additional qualifications, but which need not be here specified. Hence two facts of serious moment force themselves on our attention; first, that the number of thoroughly qualified superintendents and teachers urgently required by the Sabbath-School enterprise is vastly beyond the present ability of the Christian Church to supply; and second, that there are no adequate and practicable means of speedily training a sufficient supply of such workers.

What possible agency then can be employed for removing the evils arising from such a state of things? There are many Sabbath-School workers who are sensible of their deficiencies and willing to learn. For such, Sabbath-School Associations and Conventions afford the most ready means of improvement. Earnest labourers meet to compare their experience, their difficulties and their plans. Questions put and answered may bring out information of the highest value. The experience of the few who have spent years in the study and practical working out of the problems of Sabbath-School labour, becomes available to the many; and a beginner may learn the means of introducing improvements at once, which would have required perhaps years to discover by his own unaided efforts. The great value of this means of diffusing information and influencing many earnest minds is felt and acknowledged in the extent to which such agency is now employed for promoting desirable objects, whether these are religious, scientific or political. Where practicable, an Association should be formed under a few simple rules, and regular times appointed for holding its Conventions. This Association may embrace the Sabbath-School workers within any extent of territory from a village or township to a nation.

I.

THE IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS OF SABBATH-SCHOOL CONVENTIONS.

Earnest Christian men and women met for a day or for two or three days to give their minds and hearts to the study of the means of higher efficiency in the Sabbath-School, can scarcely leave the meeting without having received benefits, which, if properly followed up, must make them ever afterwards better workers. A ripe experience brought to bear on the inexperienced, the deep devotional spirit which pervades the assembly, the prayers and praises which bring the soul up to the fountain of spiritual influence, the best thoughts expressed in the fewest words, the discussion of interesting and practical questions, and the model exercises which are introduced—all exert a powerful influence for good on those who attend. Earnestness kindles earnestness, and the earnest learner obtains much of the most valuable truth respecting the best modes of teaching a class and the best modes of managing a school.

In considering the importance and value of these conventions the first place should be assigned to their influence in *awakening zeal*. There is perhaps no department of Christian effort in which zeal is so necessary for success, and perhaps none in which it is so apt to cool. A healthy stimulus needs to be periodically applied, to raise those who are languid, and to keep up those who are earnest. When a Convention has been well conducted, and the members of it separate with their love to the Saviour and the lambs of His flock quickened, their self devotion to His work renewed, and their zeal kindled with fire from above, it cannot be that all these ministers, superintendents and teachers shall return home under such influences without extending around them a precious spiritual power. The diffusive nature of Christianity is thus applied in numerous

places at once, and spiritual refreshing may come on many desert spots. The light bearers come together to have their own souls brightened, and then return to cause their light to shine in many dark places for many days to come.

Another benefit arising from a Sabbath-School Convention is to be found in its *drawing christians of different names nearer together*. Under the warmth of the spirit of love the affections are drawn forth to others, who, however differing in external things, are felt to be one in Christ. Sectarian prejudices are softened down or removed to such an extent that the question is forgotten as to what section of the Christian Church one or another may belong. If in any age intense earnestness is peculiarly necessary for doing the work of Christ, and reality is needed instead of sham and pretence, the present is that age. The blessed influences of closet communion with God are augmented and extended by the devotions and other exercises of the Convention, and we return to our individual fields of labour, loving one another more deeply as we have learned to see the likeness of Christ in each other, and feeling that we have received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit to prepare us for renewed work for Christ, as fellow-workers with Him.

An important benefit of these Conventions is in the *large amount of practical knowledge which is acquired in a comparatively short time*. The meetings usually have the presence of Sabbath-School men of great experience in the peculiarities of the work, and who are capable of conveying much of that knowledge to others in the exercises of the Convention; while the experience of even the humblest workers is valuable as a means of mutual help and encouragement, and much information in the best methods of instruction is eventually given and received. As many are teachers in the Sabbath-School who are very destitute of a theoretic knowledge of the science of education and a practical knowledge of the art of teaching, the use of the Convention we are now considering becomes a very important one. It is not assumed that a Convention or a number of Conventions will make a person a good teacher who has never been regularly trained as a teacher. But in the great and pressing necessity of the case, in the number of *untrained teachers who must be employed* the results of the Convention are highly to be prized, and thankfully to be used for even partially supplying a great want.

The Sabbath-School Convention has been the means of developing correct ideas of the *immense importance of Sabbath-School labour*. So quiet and unobtrusive is the humble and self-denying work of many workers in this field, that the Church of Christ is slow to learn its real value. The value of the Sabbath-School as a link of connection between the children of Church members and the Church has been often overlooked. Its power as an evangelistic agency both in Church and Mission efforts has not been fully appreciated. One hour in a week for religious instruction appears very little for those neglected children whose days are spent in vice; yet, let it be observed that in many cases it is their only source of religious instruction, and it is cause of thankfulness that, feeble as it is, it has been the means of bringing many precious souls to Jesus. Apart from Sabbath-School Conventions few are fully aware of the wonderfully rapid development of Sabbath-School labour, or of the value of that labour as an evangelistic agency. Conventions are well fitted to impress these truths on the minds of those who attend, and as these are likely to be earnest Christians, much is done to bring out the proper relation between the Church and School, and to bring the working piety of the former to bear on the improvement and advancement of the latter. Christians will do well to consider the following indisputable truths; first, every kind of effort for the moral and religious improvement of the world is suffering from a deficiency of the means, moral and material, which are necessary for the highest success, and particularly, *the deficiency of personal effort*. This want is severely felt in the Sabbath-School enterprise. Secondly, the health of the soul requires the use of the above named

means, and especially that of personal effort in working for Jesus. Sabbath-School Conventions bring out in a very impressive manner these truths, and show that self-denying labour in seeking to save the young is the best remedy for those soul diseases so prevalent among Christians now. Is the Christian suffering from doubts and fears and darkness of mind? Are his affections cold and his aspirations feeble? Let him go with earnest personal effort to work for Jesus, and a morning of joy will dawn on his soul.

The benefits of a Convention are not confined to those who attend. Returning home aroused and quickened from the stirring exercises in which they have taken part, they put forth thoughts and efforts which arouse other minds, fresh zeal is infused into the community, and the teaching and conducting of the school is improved.

The last object of a Sabbath-School Convention we shall here mention is the organizing and directing of efforts for the extension of Sabbath-School work in the field embraced by the Convention, whether that be a Province, a County, a City, or a Township. There is everywhere a field of labour and a work to be done for the extension of the Sabbath-School Mission. To overtake this work brought so near us, is a plain duty, but how to do it is sometimes a problem of difficult solution. A Convention affords the opportunity of organizing the available means which can be employed, and of using them to the best advantage. By consulting as to the best means and combining their efforts, the earnest workers may be able to excite an interest in the work, where such does not already exist, and in many instances to succeed in opening and keeping up new Schools in localities hitherto destitute. This may be done by personal effort in fields of limited extent, as in a city, town or township. Where an Association embraces a wider field as a County or Province, much may be done by employing a Sabbath-School Missionary to canvass the field, co-operating with the Churches, Ministers and existing Schools, always trying to *draw out unemployed piety and ability*, that the number of workers may be ever increasing.

II.

THE MODE OF CONDUCTING SABBATH-SCHOOL CONVENTIONS.

Where an Association is in existence, its Conventions will be called pursuant to adjournment, or as may be provided for by its rules. Where an Association has not been formed, a number of Sabbath-School men should consult together and agree to hold a Convention, at the time the most suitable and in the place the most convenient for the largest number of those who may be expected to attend. Every effort should be used to get all the religious denominations interested in the movement and to unite in calling the meeting. A circular should then be prepared naming the place and time for the meeting, stating a few strong reasons for holding the Convention and naming subjects for consideration. In some instances partial programmes may be included. Every effort should then be used to obtain thorough publicity to the movement. Ministers of all denominations should be asked to announce it in good season, and if they would preach on the subject of Sabbath-Schools and call special attention to the Convention on some previous Sabbath, it would doubtless do much good. The local press should be asked to publish and recommend the matter. Special efforts should be used to interest Churches and Sabbath-Schools and induce them to send ministers and delegates. Prayer on behalf of the Convention should be asked for in the Churches and Sabbath-Schools as well as in the family and closet, that the Spirit of God may be present with a rich blessing, filling the hearts of the brethren who may assemble with heavenly love, and their minds with heavenly wisdom and guidance. The projectors of the Con-

vention should in good time appoint provisional committees to make all needful arrangements.

As soon as possible, arrangements should be made to furnish entertainment for the delegates who are expected, and as much as possible should be done beforehand in assigning the guests to their entertainers, so as to avoid delay and confusion on their arrival. The provisional committees should have everything which can be done beforehand in readiness, as the transaction of preliminary business at the opening of a Convention may have a most disastrous effect on the spirit and tone of the meeting. The opening exercises should be devotional and stimulating, so as to intensify and perpetuate the holy joy which will be felt in such an assembly.

When a Convention assembles, a certain amount of business must be transacted, and its effect on the spirit of the meeting will depend very much on the wisdom with which preparation has been made. After the opening with devotional exercises has taken place, it is usual to appoint a Nominating Committee, who immediately retire for deliberation, and then comes a difficulty respecting the way in which the time should be occupied until the Committee are ready to report. If left to hap-hazard, it may become a time of dullness, or of exercises unsuitable to the occasion. Feelings of delicacy and fear of offending should be set aside, and definite arrangements should be previously made for filling up the time in a useful manner. *Mere speech-making should at all times be discouraged*, and experience shows that the members of a Convention at its first session are not prepared to make *volunteer addresses of real value and interest*. It is recommended, therefore, that a number of persons be asked beforehand, each to prepare his thoughts so as to make a short address on a subject named. Let these addresses be interspersed with prayers and singing, all very short. Thirty to forty-five minutes spent in addresses of five minutes each (or perhaps one of them of ten minutes), prayers of two minutes each, interspersed with singing four to eight lines of a rousing hymn, will be well spent, and will avoid the feelings of uneasiness and disappointment which are often experienced at the opening of a Convention. The Nominating Committee having brought in their report, the appointment of office bearers for the Association, with the several Committees required, may be made in a few moments. The Business Committee will then have to retire and prepare for the next Session. This will be a suitable time for the reading of an Essay. If one is to be read, the preparation of it will of course have been provided for by the Provisional (or Executive) Committee. After being read, the Essay should be discussed in volunteer speeches of from three to five minutes. The Business Committee having made a report of arrangements for the next Session, the first will be closed with devotional exercises.

At all the Sessions of the Convention, the details of business should be so arranged as to be transacted with as little delay as possible, and while a certain amount of routine must be gone through, care on the part of the Business Committee may prevent it from dissipating the higher feelings which a Convention seeks to cherish. It should be remembered that it is precious time for the spiritual interests of the delegates and the interests of many Sabbath Schools which is being used, and every moment unnecessarily spent in mere routine or in fruitless discussion is a serious loss to the highest interests of human souls. Hence the necessity for strict order, rigid punctuality, and the shortest speeches consistent with the object for which they are made.

A Provincial Convention will usually meet in the afternoon, and continue two days and a half; one for a County should continue one day and a half; a local Convention may meet and continue as suits the convenience of the members.

OFFICE BEARERS.

The Office Bearers of an Association should be appointed on account of their fitness, and as being the best Sabbath School men to be found. As far as this principle admits, they should embrace all denominations represented. In this as in all matters, care should be taken to avoid stirring up opposition or jealousy on the part of any denomination. Hearty good will and co-operation are needed. The President should be a man of piety and earnestness; gentle and courteous in his manners; familiar with the rules which regulate the proceedings of deliberative bodies; prompt and decisive in action. He requires tact and judgment to keep the Convention moving on without loss of time; decision sufficient to stop *any one in any exercise* when the general good requires it, or the time allotted for the exercise has expired, and suavity to do so without giving offence. A Provincial Association should have as permanent office bearers, a President, Vice Presidents, a Provincial Secretary, a Treasurer, and an Executive Committee; also a County Secretary for each County in the Province; and any special Committees that may be needed. When met in Convention, there will be needed in addition, several Assistant Secretaries, a Business Committee, through whom all business must come; and a Committee on resolutions to collect the general sense of the discussions and embody it in a series of resolutions to be reported near the close of the Convention. Other special Committees will be appointed as they may be required.

SESSIONS.

The morning session should be preceded by a prayer meeting lasting half an hour; say from 8.30 to 9 o'clock. The exercises should embrace six to eight prayers or more; one or two addresses, and four or five songs. Besides these services, short and lively devotional exercises should be interspersed among the other engagements of the sessions. The singing should be of the most rousing spiritual kind; the prayers should be earnest and generally limited to definite objects desired. General indefinite petitions in prayer are unsuitable to the devotions of a Convention, as general speaking is unsuitable to its discussions. Let it be laid down as a positive rule that *all exercises of every kind in a Convention must be short.*

The time of a Convention is most precious, and should be used to the best advantage. All addresses and other exercises therefore, should be carefully prepared so as not to lose time. The members have met to be awakened to a deeper sense of the importance of the Sabbath School work, and to obtain light on the best way of doing that work. Their hearts are turned on the question how they can make their teaching more *plain*, so as to be easily understood, more *warm*, so as to touch the heart, and more *interesting*, so as to attract the little ones to Jesus. Let all exercises then be devout, interesting and impressive. The place is holy, and everything frivolous, commonplace and apart from the reigning spirit of the meeting should be put down. The Business Committee should exclude all irrelevant matters from their programmes, and in particular prevent any agents of religious operations which are only remotely connected with the Sabbath School from advertising any pet schemes before the Convention. The President in like manner should stop any irrelevant speaking in discussion and mercilessly ring down everything which is not to the point. A Convention cannot afford to listen even to good speeches, if they are not to the point in hand. Let the President then ring down every one who wanders from the subject; let him prohibit all discussion on points of order, by which even good men, if allowed, would destroy a session. No speaking is of any use unless it will either *stimulate* or *instruct*; let all else be put down. The one great and important object sought, is to bring the greatest influence to bear on the eternal interests of the children, and nothing should be allowed to divert the thoughts of the Convention from that object.

The Business Committee will arrange the various parts of the work so as to be the most effective, assigning the time for each. Business items should be relieved by illustrations of model opening and closing exercises for a school; model lessons for the several grades of classes; the consideration of the appliances to be used as aids, such as black-boards, mode of arranging classes, maps, pictures, objects and object lessons; model teachers' meetings, and practical discussions. The evening session will usually embrace a number of addresses on special topics, both by members of the Association, and by strangers who may be in attendance.

DISCUSSIONS.

A good way of conducting a discussion is to have some person appointed beforehand to open the discussion, allowing him ten minutes (or more if the nature of the subject requires it). It may be well to appoint a stranger to this duty if one is present who is known to have large experience in that particular subject. Volunteer speeches of three or five minutes may then follow, being always practical and strictly relevant. No one should speak from mere impulse, but if any one has carefully considered the matter and has a useful and practical thought on the subject which he can earnestly express, let him by all means speak. Discussions should always tend to the advancement of the work of Sabbath-School teaching.

SUBJECTS OF DISCUSSION.

A few of these may be noticed. One of the most important is, *the preparation of the teacher for his work*. This will have respect to him personally in the spiritual preparation of the heart, and the intellectual culture of mind required. It will also have respect to the special preparing of the lessons which he is to teach. This will include the way of studying the Bible itself; the use of helps, as concordances, commentaries, books of oriental travel, manners and customs, bible geography, natural history, &c.; the best modes of collecting and storing facts for future use; the use of illustrations; the study of child nature; the art of teaching; the art of arresting and securing attention; the art of bringing all teaching to bear on the moral nature of the child; the ability to present to the child a clear, attractive and beautiful ideal of Christian character and life; the best means of forming the image of Christ on that plastic, impressible and everlasting substance, the child's soul; and the most effective way of making all the teacher's work bear on the child's conversion and salvation. Closely connected with the teacher's preparation, is the scholar's preparation. A proper subject of discussion will then be, the means of securing the previous preparation of the lesson by the children.

Another subject suitable for discussion will be, *helps to teaching*, apart from the teacher's mental preparation. The use of the black-board has been found a valuable aid in all other kinds of teaching, and the numerous ways in which it may be made a valuable help in the Sabbath-School should be discussed and illustrated. The value and use of maps, pictures and object lessons as powerful auxiliaries in making the truth comprehensible, should also be discussed, and information given as to how they may be obtained.

A Library is a very important adjunct to a school, and the enormous development, within the past few years, of this department of the general work, shews how deeply its importance is felt. As the value of a library will depend on the quality of the books composing it, the best mode of making a selection from the books offered to the public, will be a useful subject of discussion. The conductors of Sabbath-Schools are often sorely puzzled in the use of a library after it has been procured. The books rapidly get soiled and torn; the binding gives way, and they fall to pieces; and many of them speedily disappear altogether.

Earnest men have planned and contrived, have formed regulations and re-formed them, for the management of the library, and have almost given up in despair, as if an effective management of it were impossible. This subject has latterly attracted the attention of some of the ablest Sabbath-School workers, and some of the more recently devised plans may very profitably be discussed.

The *proper grading* of the several departments of a school, and, along with this, its architectural arrangements, may here be noticed. The best form and position of the seats for classes; the provision for the infant class, and how connected with and separated from the other classes; the construction of school rooms, as part of church edifices, or as separate buildings, and kindred subjects, are suitable for discussion.

The want of means to procure suitable rooms, furniture, and apparatus, is, in a majority of schools, a serious hindrance to efficiency. Men may know what good aids to teaching are, and may know how to use them well, but who can not procure the money wherewith to purchase the needed articles. Hence, to the teachers of a great majority of the schools in the Province, one of the most practically interesting questions to be discussed, is this: *How can we make the most of limited means?* To lay out, to the best advantage, the small sum they have to spend on these objects, and to make the most of an imperfect equipment, may be profitably discussed. An important question attaches itself to this subject, and may also be discussed, namely, What is the best method of raising money for the support of a Sabbath-School?

The only other subject we shall mention here, is the vital one of *procuring teachers*. There is much of the piety and ability of the Christian Church which is, as yet, unemployed in the Sabbath-School cause. Unquestionably the Lord has need of these, and means should be used to bring more labourers to the most promising part of the whole harvest-field, where the souls of the young may be gathered.

MODEL EXERCISES.

These may, perhaps, be regarded as touching on the ground of the Sabbath-School Institute; but no Convention will be very efficient, unless it include some Institute exercises. They may be rendered highly instructive and valuable to many teachers who come to the Convention for the purpose of learning from others, and improving their own practice.

The opening and closing exercise of the school may include definitions and illustrations of the devotional services with which a school is opened; the presenting of a special text, or the central thought of the lesson, orally or on the blackboard; an object lesson to illustrate the central thought; the summing up of the lesson; and the exercises with which the school is closed.

A *class lesson* may illustrate the mode of teaching a class, the modes of questioning which may be employed, and the bearing of Bible literature, geography, history, biography, ethics, and theology, on the lesson.

Infant Class teaching. To be well done, this will require an experienced infant class teacher, with a class of children, to be brought into the Convention, and a lesson, which they have not been previously taught, to be used, so as to give a real example of the ordinary work in the class.

Blackboard lessons, object lessons, and map lessons, may be introduced, and the mode of using them in the school may be practically illustrated, so as to enable teachers who have never used them, to prepare themselves for employing these valuable aids.

A *teachers' meeting* may be brought out not only in description and illustration, but after this has been done, the Convention itself may be turned into such

a meeting and all the ordinary exercises gone through, greatly to the advantage of the assembled teachers.

QUESTION DRAWER.

There are many subjects on which teachers desire information, which they do not obtain in the discussions and exercises which we have already noticed. For their benefit an exercise bearing the above name is provided. Slips of paper are distributed in the Convention, on which the members write their questions, and at a specified time drop them into a hat or bag. They are then given to a person of the highest knowledge and experience who gives rapid verbal answers to them, and thus the whole Convention gets the benefit. This process is sometimes reversed, and thereby becomes an *answer drawer*; a question being given out to the Convention, answers to which are written, given in and read. The answers are sometimes given verbally, but this practice is not generally desirable, as liable to lead to confusion and frittering away of time.

HIGHER AIMS.

One great want of this day is a vast extension of the Sabbath-School work. There is a loud call on the Church at large and on individuals for action. All the exercises of a Sabbath-School Convention should force the truth on the conscience that there is a pressing want of more work for Jesus. Time is short, souls are perishing, and how can they be saved? By love within and work without. Let the loving heart pour itself out in work,—earnest work, for nothing less than this will now do,—faithful work, persevering work, self-sacrificing work, patient work, prayerful work and loving work for Christ.

The history of the Sabbath-School enterprise, though yet short, shows that it has passed through several important epochs. At first, an instructor of the poor and destitute in the elements of a common education; then a teacher of children in religious truth; next growing into an important instrument of the Church for its own edification, it has now expanded into one of the most extensive and efficient agencies which the Church employs for evangelizing the masses and bringing the knowledge of salvation to the lost. It is not to be wondered at that many of the most earnest and devoted christians of the present day should turn their attention to the means of increasing and extending its efficiency. The formation of Sabbath-School Associations, and the holding of Sabbath-School Conventions afford the most ready means of doing this, and consequently these are rapidly multiplying and increasing in usefulness.

We have not made suggestions as to any special means to be used in forming Associations, or conducting Conventions in Counties, Cities, Towns, Villages and Townships as distinguished from those of a Province. The principles governing them and the exercises to be employed are so much alike in all, that we have not considered it necessary to do so. The differences in practice arising from the differences of circumstances can easily be arranged by the use of ordinary judgment and skill. The great matter in all cases is to obtain a large attendance, a deep interest, rousing exercises and practical means of training teachers to be better teachers than they were before. It is most important that efforts should be used to have Associations formed and Conventions held in every Municipality in the Province where several schools exist or may be organized.

SABBATH SCHOOL INSTITUTES.

Sabbath School Conventions have shown the necessity of some more practicable means of training teachers for their work. The Convention goes a certain length in giving general information, and new and valuable suggestions to teachers; but training of a more direct and systematic nature is necessary, and

Sabbath School Institutes have arisen as the next step in advance. In these the practice assimilates itself to Normal School teaching. A course of study is marked out and followed by the Conductor or Conductors of the Institute, in which the teachers present are trained in the principles and practice of Sabbath School teaching. By holding local Institutes, at times to suit the convenience of teachers, much good may be done in this way. Sometimes a succession of evenings may be devoted to the holding of an Institute, so that many whose other duties render it impossible for them to give whole days to attendance, may yet be able to reap the benefit.

SABBATH SCHOOL NORMAL COLLEGE.

The Institute is not the last step of progress; the wish is rising for something more definite and permanent. We hail with joy the call of the recent New York State Convention to their sister States and the Dominion of Canada to join in founding an International Sabbath School Normal College for the training of teachers. The value and importance of Sabbath School teaching is thus becoming better appreciated, and the necessity of higher training is becoming more felt. We trust the time is not very far distant, when not one only, but several such institutions shall exist for the better preparation of teachers for their work. We hope also soon to see the Christian Church so awakened to a sense of the true value of the Sabbath School, that a thorough training on this subject with an ability to guide others in this work will be required as a necessary part of the educational training of the Christian minister, and the preparation for his pastoral duties.

To attain the full benefit of a Sabbath School Convention, it is necessary to carry out into practice the knowledge there acquired. Let all then who attend, pastors, superintendents and teachers, before the kindled zeal becomes cold or the truths acquired are forgotten, go vigorously to work to obtain a practical result. Bring everything to a practical use; let improvements be introduced and patiently followed up, and we may rest assured that the result will be to the honour of God and the saving of souls by means of feeding the Saviour's lambs.

NOTE.—The writer of the above Essay considered himself bound to keep to the title named in the printed circular, and therefore to allude to Sabbath School Institutes only incidentally. Had the title been "Sabbath School Conventions, and Institutes, &c," the essay, by treating more fully on Institutes, might have been more useful and more fully up to the present standing of the Sabbath School enterprise. Much of what is written above will, however, apply to Institutes as well as Conventions.

In these
of study
Institute,
e of Sab-
the con-
es a suc-
mat many
attend-

Sabbath-School Conventions ;

THEIR IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS, AND THE BEST MODE OF CONDUCTING THEM.

BY REV. JOHN WOOD.

Being the Essay to which was awarded the Second Prize, at the Provincial Sabbath-School Convention of 1867.

omething
ent New
a to join
ining of
ecoming
ore felt
ral such
rk. We
the true
with an
t of the
for his

It must be obvious to the most casual observer, that the capabilities of the Sabbath-School, as an institution for the moral and religious training of the young, are as yet far from being fully developed. Taking even the best specimens that can be found, we shall probably discover, upon a close inspection of them, many things lacking, and some things perhaps positively, bad and prejudicial in their management and modes of instruction. Some of these must undoubtedly be set down as inseparable from our fallen humanity,—evils to be endured, since they cannot be cured—but others of them are curable, and are perpetuated only because of the inexperience, inaptitude, or indifference of those who conduct them.

ssary to
attend,
cold or
ractical
roduced
ill be to
aviour's

These evils need neither surprise nor discourage us. Looked at as a whole, there is no department of Christian effort that is better or more vigorously conducted than this. The work is a purely voluntary one,—a labour of faith and love. Unlike that of secular education, it is not a profession, commanding all the time and energies of those adopting it, and remunerating them with an honorable livelihood. It is performed chiefly by those who all the week long are engaged in other avocations, and often have neither the time nor the helps necessary to fit them as thoroughly as is desirable for so important a work. To a very large extent it devolves upon the younger portion of the Church, for the reason that they are generally both more at liberty and more willing to engage in it than those more advanced in years. But youth, while usually noted for zeal, and that lively sympathy for the young which is so valuable a qualification in a teacher, is also characterized by inexperience, and sometimes by instability—defects which exhibit themselves in a variety of ways—in irregularity, or unpunctuality of attendance, in a lack of acquaintance with Scripture truth, or with the best methods of teaching it, in the absence of proper self-control, or control of the class, &c., all of which tend to mar the work, and diminish the prospect of success.

keep to
Sabbath
School
stitutes,
of the
, apply

These, however, are not insuperable evils, and it should be the earnest endeavour of every friend of the Sabbath-School to remove them, and in no way is this more likely to be done than by bringing to bear upon our work the combined experience, wisdom and piety of those who have been longest and most successfully engaged in it,—in other words, by an occasional conference of the leading spirits of the enterprise. Our Provincial Conventions, and the County Associations which have sprung out of them, (as yet, we are sorry to say, comparatively few), have already proved of great service in awakening a new interest in its behalf, and it is the writer's earnest desire to see, as it is mainly the purpose of this essay to promote, the organization of such Associations all over this New Dominion.

Keeping this design in view, we shall endeavour to show :

I.—THEIR IMPORTANCE AND OBJECTS.

It is characteristic of the age in which we live, that almost every moral and

social enterprise has its annual, or occasional Convention. Men are learning the value of combination, as compared with isolated individual effort. "In the multitude of Counsellors there is safety." Constitutional and Parliamentary Reform are sought by means of leagues and mass meetings of the classes interested. Working men strengthen each other's hands by Trades-Unions. *Savants* have their Scientific Associations, and Philanthropists their Social Science Congress, by which to promote the respective objects they have in view. The several Temperance organizations, and Young Men's Christian Associations, have their Annual Conventions, and Christian Churches of all denominations, recognizing the importance of enlisting the sympathy and co-operation, as far as possible, of their entire membership, on behalf of their various Missionary Schemes, hold their anniversaries in all the great centres of population throughout the land. The facilities of travel and of communication now afforded us, render such gatherings comparatively easy and inexpensive, and the fact that the children of this world, who are often "wiser in their generation than the children of light," are employing them so extensively in the furtherance of their ends, ought to convince us of the value to us of similar means in the pursuit of the objects we have in view.

"Union is strength," and the adage is not less true of moral than of material forces. Missions to the heathen could never have been carried on, with their present degree of efficiency, by unorganized effort. The translation, printing, and circulation of the Holy Scriptures, in the many foreign tongues to which they have been given by our great National Bible Societies, would have been a work altogether too difficult and costly for private enterprise. And so, the planting of the Sabbath-School all over this young and rising country, can never be fully accomplished without calling out the combined energies and zeal of all the churches towards that specific object.

This, then, we take to be the great end of a Sabbath-school Convention,—the bringing together of the most experienced and most earnest friends and helpers of the cause, for mutual conference and instruction in regard to the details of their work; for their spiritual quickening and encouragement in relation to it; the enlisting of a livelier and more general interest in the Churches in its behalf; and the extension of the enterprise all over the land.

To show how such a Convention tends to promote these objects, will, without doubt, be its highest recommendation. We shall therefore examine these points in order.

1. The mutual improvement of the Teachers and Managers of our Sabbath-Schools. Many of those who are engaged in this work have never seen any other School than the one to which they belong,—have had no instruction in regard to teaching,—and receive no help in the preparation of the lessons; and while doing the best that can be expected of them, under the circumstances, are labouring under the greatest disadvantage. They do as others have done before them, and fall into a dull routine of exercises, hardly conceiving that there can be any other or better way of conducting them. Everything is stereotyped. The singing belongs to the last century, and is altogether unsuited in style to the taste and capacities of children. The prayer is a weekly repetition of the same set phrases. The lesson is gone through as a task, of which both teachers and scholars are tired before it is completed. The library is neglected and mismanaged. And thus the school goes on, year in and year out, in one unvarying round, the question apparently never arising, whether some improvement could not be made in its management.

Now, one of the direct advantages of a Sabbath-School Convention is, that we have there brought together, and gathered as it were into a *focus*, the wisdom and experience of many earnest thinkers and workers, from different parts of our own country, and often from other lands, thus enabling each one to com-

pare the various methods in use in his particular department of labour, and to choose the best. The Superintendent learns how he may conduct the School so as to secure at once the greatest order and efficiency, the Librarian discovers the best method of managing his books; and the teacher has suggested to him a variety of ways, before unthought of, in which he may engage the attention, reach the understanding, and win the hearts of his scholars. And, what is better still,—all are set to thinking and planning how they may improve the school. Their hearts are enlisted anew, and each one finds for himself ways of doing his work more efficiently; for what we want is, not servile imitation of any one method, but a lively, earnest, and natural manner, combined with an intelligent and thoroughly evangelical presentation of divine truth. Thus the Sabbath School Convention becomes a kind of Normal School for the training of teachers, and lies at the very foundation of all true progress in our work.

Another most important object sought, and to a good degree secured, by such conventions, is:—

2. The spiritual quickening and encouragement of the teachers. It is not too much, perhaps, to say that the attendance on such occasions is made up, for the most part, of the best, most intelligent, and most earnest labourers in the Sabbath-School cause. We have, alas! in most of our schools, some teachers who make no public profession of religion, and who, it is to be feared, have no experimental acquaintance with the power of vital Godliness. But these would probably not be the choice of their fellow-teachers, as delegates to such a Convention, nor would they be likely to feel enough of interest in the objects of such a gathering, to lead them to attend if they were. Hence it is fair to infer that we get together, on such occasions, the very best class of Sabbath-School teachers.

More than that,—our Sabbath-Schools usually enlist the sympathies and co-operation of the very best and most earnest class of Church members, those who are foremost in every good work; and hence such a convention brings together the picked men,—*la crème de la crème*,—of the churches of all denominations, those who are, at once, the most able to do, and the most likely to get good.

Such a gathering can scarcely fail of the favour and blessing of Him who has promised that “whosoever two or three meet together in His name, there will He be in the midst of them.” They have left their homes in the East, and in the West, praying that He, whose command they are endeavouring to fulfil, in feeding the lambs of His flock, will manifest Himself unto them, and fit and equip them more thoroughly for His work. Their minds and hearts are in their most receptive condition. Speakers and hearers are in lively sympathy with each other. Every encouraging word, every earnest appeal, every illustration of the power of divine truth, or of the faithfulness of God in hearing and answering prayer, tells upon them, until their hearts are all aglow with the love of Christ. So that, even if they should return to their homes, unable to carry with them anything beyond a general impression of what they had heard, they would not have attended the Convention in vain.

“It is something good,” says an eminent minister of the Gospel, in England, in reference to similar gatherings, “simply to meet, even though our meetings were in silence. It is good to look each other in the face with confidence and love, and to say by the steady light of the eye, and by the peace that overlays the countenance, ‘Brother, another year has gone, but I am still true to our Master, and loyal to our King.’ It is good to grasp each other’s hands, as a symbol of the charity that never faileth, and as a sign of the outloving love which is superior to the severing power of absence, and of distance, and to the destructive force of the teeth of time. It is good for the heart that has, perhaps, through months felt solitary, to feel many kindred spirits near. It is good to show by our very coming together, that, as members of one body, we have some

care one of another. All this is surely something, and something good, and something *done*. It is something good simply to meet, and something better to speak to each other, words of truth and grace,—“to comfort yourselves together and to edify one another, even as also ye do.” Shall we whose work is so largely wrought by means of *words*, underrate christian utterance? May not many good works spring from thoughts suggested by words spoken in this assembly, as a forest of oaks may rise from a handful of acorns? But if it be good to meet, and if it be better to speak to each other, it is better still to meet to *pray*. The effectual fervent prayers of righteous men avail much; and when we agree as touching the good things which we shall ask—and when we ask these good things of God, with one heart and with one soul,—we are employing the most mighty force within our reach. Something will indeed be done by our assembling together, if we ask in faith that *fresh power* may be given to us by the Holy Ghost.”

Have we not ourselves experienced the truth of these eloquent words, and felt, as we have journeyed homeward from our Conventions, that all the cost and trouble of attendance have been amply repaid by the spiritual enjoyment of the occasion and the impetus given to us in our work? “As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” It may not be easy to say just how this impetus is communicated. The numbers whom we see engaged in the same good work as ourselves, may have something to do with it; their zeal and earnestness still more, probably; but chief of all, doubtless, there is the presence of the Head of the Church, and that unseen but Almighty influence of His Spirit, which, in answer to prayer, distills “like the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion,” and that alone shall bring a blessing with it, “even life for evermore.”

3. A third, and equally important object, promoted by Sabbath-School Conventions is, the increasing of the Churches’ interest in this work. It is not necessary to say anything by way of attempting to show the value of the Sabbath-School as an auxiliary to the parents, and the pastor, in the training of the young. With all its imperfections, there is no agency, outside of a christian home, that does so much to form their religious opinions, or lead them in the way of life. The connection, therefore, between the Church, and its Sabbath-School, ought to be very intimate, and its care over it very earnest and practical. It is a matter of deep regret, however, that there is often but little connection between them, beyond the fact that the School assembles in the Lecture Room of the Church, and is called by its name.

Anything, therefore, that tends to increase the interest of the Church in the Sabbath-School work is eminently desirable, and we know of no means better adapted to achieve this result than a Sabbath-School Convention. The influence we have been describing, as exerted by it upon its members, cannot stop there; it will be felt far beyond the immediate circle of those who were present at it. The delegates report, in many cases, to the Schools and Congregations that send them, and relate in private the various opinions and remarks that most impressed them; and what memory fails to carry away with it, the press supplies in its daily record of the proceedings. And thus the subject of Sabbath-School instruction becomes, for a time, the chief topic of discussion, and is invested with a new interest.

These remarks apply with equal force to County Conventions, which, in our judgment, are of quite as much importance, within their more limited sphere, as the Provincial. In some respects they may appear to be less attractive, but there are points of view in which they possess some advantages over the larger gatherings. Being nearer home, many persons will avail themselves of them, who have neither the time nor the means at their disposal, to enable them to go to those at a great distance;—they reach a class of teachers who possess the

fewest advantages for self-culture, and observation, and will probably reap the greatest amount of benefit from them;—they afford an opportunity for females to attend them,—a privilege which they rarely enjoy in connection with the Provincial Convention;—and lastly, being much smaller, and more manageable, many persons will suggest questions, or take part in the discussions that may arise, who would feel abashed at the very thought of doing so in the larger assembly. While, therefore, we look to the Provincial Association for the motive power, figuratively speaking, of all our machinery, we must do our utmost to secure the formation of County Associations throughout the Dominion, so as to bring that power into the widest possible use. The latter are but the complement of the former,—the one is the great throbbing heart of the Sabbath-School enterprise,—the others are the *arteries* and *capillaries*, carrying its warm pulsations of love and mercy to the farthest extremities of the system.

4. Sabbath-School Conventions are exerting a most powerful influence in the extension of the Sabbath-School enterprise. Apart from the increased interest it has awakened in the work itself, our Provincial Association has already done good service, by revealing the destitution existing in some of the newer parts of the country, and arousing the Churches to the necessity of more vigorous measures to supply them. The statistical returns presented at the annual meeting in Montreal last year,—by far the most complete yet obtained,—show a total of 1294 Sabbath-Schools in (what was then called) Canada, with an attendance of 86,726 scholars; or in the Western Province alone, 1183 schools, with 78,089 scholars. The same year there were in operation in the same Province, (now Ontario,) 4,808 common schools, with an attendance of 383,052 scholars. Hence, if these returns afford us even an approximation to the truth, it will be seen that scarcely more than one fourth,—more complete returns might possibly increase the proportion to one third,—of the children of this Western Province, are as yet gathered into her Sabbath-Schools.

Here is a field for christian enterprise, the extent of which would never have been known but for our Sabbath-School Association, and which only some such organization can properly explore and cultivate. Already has it set its hand to this work, and sure are we that there is none more worthy, or that will more readily command the sympathies and support of the Christian Church, of all denominations.

And here again, we see the necessity for the formation of County Associations. Upon them ultimately, or upon those, at least, who ought to form them, and sustain them, must rest the responsibility of their own particular sphere. It is for them first to explore, and, if possible, to occupy the field. Every man must build "over against his own house." Or, if the work be found to be too great for the County Association, let them then appeal for help to the Provincial, making their prayer meanwhile, "to the Lord of the harvest, that He would thrust forth labourers into the harvest." Willing hands and praying hearts are all that we need, with God's blessing, to make the most desert and desolate places of our land, to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Such then, in our view, are the objects contemplated and promoted by Sabbath-School Conventions. Their importance can hardly be over-estimated, and if we have been able to show that they are, to any considerable extent, attainable by their means, no other argument will be needed to prove the desirableness of establishing one in every County in Canada.

It is time, however, to turn our attention to the second part of our subject, viz.,—

II.—THE BEST MODE OF CONDUCTING THEM.

Their usefulness will very largely depend upon the intelligence, and business tact, of those who have the management of them. Such meetings oftener fail of

their purpose for want of a *head*, than from any other cause. We propose, therefore, to offer a few suggestions, such as may be likely to be of service to those to whom a Sabbath-School Convention may be a new thing.

To begin then, *ab initio* :—

1. As to the calling of a Convention. The Ministers, and Superintendents of Sabbath-Schools, in the County Town, and immediate neighborhood, acting in concert, might very properly take the initiative in such a movement, inviting, by circular or otherwise, all teachers of Sabbath-Schools in the County, to meet them, at a specified time and place, for the purpose of organizing a County Association. The arrangements for the entertainment of the teachers, and other friends attending the meeting, should, of course, be left in the hands of a Committee, which might be appointed at the preliminary conference, at which, also, a docket of business should be prepared for the first day's session.

From these County Associations, delegates should be sent to the Provincial Association, which would thus become a representative Body, composed of all the more prominent, and intelligent labourers in the Sabbath School cause, throughout the land. The deliberations of such a Body would have much more weight, than if they were nothing more than the opinions of a self-constituted gathering of the friends of Sabbath-Schools.

2. A County Association having been formed, the Teachers should do their utmost to sustain it. Every School should, if possible, be represented at its Annual Meeting. The cost and trouble would be trifling, and the advantages to be reaped from it, supposing it were properly conducted, would be immense. Of course the attendance, after the first or second meeting, will be very much in proportion to the interest those meetings have awakened; but, on the other hand, the interest awakened will also be much affected by the attendance. A crowd always attracts, while empty benches repel and chill. Hence, neglect of such a meeting not only deprives the unrepresented School of any benefit that might have been derived from attendance, but it detracts from the general interest of the occasion, and damages the meeting of the following year.

3. The manner in which the Convention, or the Association, is organized, will have much to do with its efficiency. The hour spent in (what is sometimes contemptuously shunned as "routine,") the appointment of officers, &c., often decides the measure of its success. Instead, therefore, of leaving all the preliminaries to a few, the delegates should all be in their places at the hour of assembling, and secure the appointment of the most suitable men upon the several committees. Special care should be taken to obtain a prompt and intelligent chairman, some one well acquainted with the rules in general use, in all deliberative assemblies; and if such a man is not to be found in the neighbourhood, it were better even to import one from a distance, if it can be done without arousing jealousy. And further, by all means let us have *christian* men in the chair, on such occasions, men chosen, not for their worldly distinction, but for their personal worth and earnest interest in the work in hand. Great care should also be taken to secure the appointment of a good Business Committee, and, before the final adjournment, of an energetic Executive, to arrange for the next annual meeting.

4. The Executive Committee should provide, *inter alia*, for the following exercises:—(a). The reading and discussing of papers, previously assigned to competent hands, on questions of wide and practical interest. Such a course need not prevent the introduction, through the Business Committee, of other topics; but it is always of advantage to have the well-digested views of a thoughtful and experienced man, as a starting point in such discussions.

Two or three able speakers from a distance also, lend interest to such a meeting. Our American brethren have, on several occasions, at both County and

Provincial Conventions, laid us under great obligations, for the assistance they have rendered us. But the delight and profit we have experienced in listening to them, must not be allowed to destroy our self-reliance. We must raise up our own Sabbath School men, and send them forth, as our neighbours have done, Apostles to this special work, to go from town to town, and from County to County, to plant and foster Sabbath Schools.

(b). A Teachers' inquiry meeting, if we may so call it, ought also to be held in connection with every Convention, at which every one might feel free to ask any question, or state any difficulty that had met him, in the prosecution of his work. Since, however, the sessions of the Convention can seldom be protracted beyond the second day, it will often be needful to limit the speakers in their replies. Short, spirited addresses, directed right to the point under discussion, are far more effective than anything lengthy, however ornate.

(c). Reports of the state and progress of the Sabbath School cause, will naturally occupy a prominent place in the proceedings. The Secretary, either County or Provincial, will be able, from the memoranda accompanying the statistical returns, to sketch its general outline; but at the Provincial Convention, every County should also report through some of its delegates, *via voce*, the more important facts connected with the work within its boundaries; and in the local Conventions, the more prominent and effective Sabbath School societies should do the same. It is always interesting and instructive to learn how other schools are conducted; what difficulties and discouragements beset them, and how they are overcome; what instances they may have had of God's converting grace among the scholars; and how the general work progresses. There is no exercise that will more powerfully call forth our sympathies towards each other, or tend more to awaken within us the spirit of prayer, than this.

(d). Illustrations of the most approved methods of instruction should also be given, by experienced and successful teachers. The conducting of infant classes, the different uses of the blackboard, and of pictures and object lessons, the arts which a loving ingenuity may devise for securing the attention, impressing the memory, and moving the hearts of the children,—the use to be made of music, and the style of it most suited to the Sabbath School,—the place to be given to the subject of Temperance, Christian Missions, &c., in the teachings of the school,—the adaptation of the opening and closing exercises to the wants and capacities of the young,—all these, and many other matters of equal moment, might be illustrated with great advantage on such occasions.

The attempt is being made, in some localities on both sides of the Atlantic, to form classes in suitable districts, for the education of Sabbath School teachers. One great difficulty, however, in the way of the establishment of such classes among us, meets us at the very outset, viz.,—the indifference of so many teachers as to self-improvement. The Rev. Dr. Steel, in a work recently published in England, entitled "The Christian Teacher in Sabbath Schools," says, "Perhaps the most ominous circumstance in our present Sabbath School movement, is the unwillingness of the majority of teachers to be taught." We fear the evil omen is not confined to Great Britain alone. But however well such classes might be attended, were they established, the fact remains that we have them not, and our Conventions must be made, therefore, as far as possible, to supply their place.

Lastly.—An earnest devotional spirit must animate, and hallow all its proceedings. Let the first hour of each day's session be spent in worship. "Them that honour me I will honour," saith God. We come together with solemn work on our hands. A conscious dependence on Divine help to do it properly, must lead us to importunity at the throne of grace. Our real success will be just in proportion to the spirit of believing prayer among us. Luther's experience,—*"to have prayed well, is to have studied well,"*—bears testimony to a

principle applicable to work, as well as to study; losing sight of that, the best arrangements, the largest attendance, the most stirring addresses, will fail of their end. But going with the desire and expectation of meeting the great Teacher, and of being filled with His Spirit, we cannot assemble in vain.

Dear fellow-labourers in the Sabbath School! Our opportunities for doing good are rapidly passing away. Even though we should live to prosecute our work for many years, the children are slipping out of our hands;—some into the presence of the great Judge, to testify either for, or against us, according as we have been faithful, or unfaithful, to our charge;—others into manhood and womanhood, with its thousand duties and cares, to bear very much the impress we do so much to put upon them all through life. How are they leaving us?—with whose image upon them? “Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?” (Jer. 13, 20). Remember that the period of a child’s attendance at Sabbath School will not average, probably, more than six or seven years; so that, out of a class of half-a-dozen, one leaves us about every year. Let us work, then, “while it is day, for the night cometh.” John Knox was wont to pray, ‘Lord, give me Scotland!’ Be it our daily petition, ‘Lord, give me my class!’—then may we hope to have many souls for our “crown of rejoicing,” “in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at His coming.”